

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

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41

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 RSC-01 CIAE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PRS-01 AID-05 IO-10 DPW-01 L-02 /063 W

----- 108955

R 211241Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2210

INFO DIA

CINCPAC

USSAG

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0458

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PGOV, EAIR, LA

SUBJ: TALK WITH DEFENSE MINISTER SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK

REF: VIENTIANE 0391 AND 0431

1. I DISCUSSED THE QUESTION OF THE DOWNED HELICOPTER WITH DEFMIN SISOUK TODAY NOTING THAT IT APPEARED TO ME THAT THE VIENTIANE SIDE HAD GONE OFF HALF-COCKED BY PUTTING THE AFFAIR IN THE HANDS OF THE JOINT COMMISSION TO IMPLEMENT THE ACCORDS. THIS SEEMED TO ME TO CONCEDE THAT PORTIONS OF THE NAM NGUM RESERVOIR WERE IN PATHET LAO HANDS, A DECISION WHICH SHOULD NOT RPT NOT BE MADE WITHOUT SOME SERIOUS THOUGHT. SISOUK AGREED AND SAID HE WOULD INSTRUCT THE VIENTIANE REPRESENTATIVE TO HOLD OFF. I STRESSED ONCE AGAIN TO SISOUK THE NECESSITY OF ACHIEVING SOME CONTROL OVER THE ACTIONS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE REPS IN THE JCIA.

2. I TOLD SISOUK THAT I PLANNED TO PROTEST THE INCIDENT. NOT TO DO SO WOULD HEIGHTEN PL SUSPICION OF U.S. AIR OPERATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME I WAS CONCERNED THAT THIS PROTEST MIGHT CAUSE THE PL TO SEEK RESTRICTIONS ON THE FLIGHTS OF MISSION AIRCRAFT IN ORDER TO ASSURE THEIR QTE SECURITY UNQTE.
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SISOUK REPLIED THAT IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT WE MAKE

A PROTEST OVER THE INCIDENT. THE VIENTIANE SIDE WOULD STONEWALL ANY RESTRICTIONS THE PL MIGHT SUBSEQUENTLY WISH TO IMPOSE.

3. FAR HAS ELABORATED SOMEWHAT ON THE INFORMATION GIVEN IN VIENTIANE 0431. IT IS APPARENT FROM STATEMENTS ALLEGED TO HAVE BEEN MADE BY THE PATHET LAO AT THE SCENE THAT THEY WOULD RESIST ANY ATTEMPTS TO RECOVER THE HELICOPTER AND HAD MOVED IN LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS BY MID-AFTERNOON JANUARY 19. AN ASSISTANT ARMY ATTACHE FLYING OVER THE CRASH SITE ON JANUARY 21 OBSERVED THAT THE HELICOPTER HAD BEEN BURNED AND THAT ONLY THE TAIL BOOM REMAINED.

4. AN INTERVIEW BY THE LOCAL AP CORRESPONDENT WITH THE USAID AREA COORDINATOR WHO WAS ABOARD THE HELICOPTER WAS PUBLISHED IN THE JANUARY 21 BANGKOK POST. IN THE ARTICLE THE AREA COORDINATOR WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT IT WAS PATHET LAO WHO SHOT AT THE HELICOPTER, THAT HE WAS LUCKY TO HAVE ESCAPED, AND THAT PL "JUST DON'T LIKE PEOPLE FLYING OVER THEIR TERRITORY."

5. EMBASSY NOTE WHICH FOLLOWS SEPTTEL DOES NOT GO THAT FAR. WE PURPOSELY ACCUSED UNKNOWN PERSONS OF FIRING AT THE HELICOPTER BECAUSE WE HAD NO ADMISSIBLE PROOF THAT THE PATHET LAO WERE INVOLVED. SECONDLY, AS MENTIONED EARLIER, WE DO NOT WISH TO OPEN QUESTION OF WHO CONTROLS WHAT AREAS. LASTLY, WE WANT TO AVOID POSSIBLE PROBLEMS FOR BIRDAIR WHEN MAKING THEIR INSURANCE CLAIM.
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Margaret P. Grafeld
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